Spencer Cook

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Taylor

The Subtle Intricacies of Filmography

Film, like every other medium of storytelling, has its own advantages that make it unique as opposed to other formats. While the structure of movies may condense the length of the story that can be told, much more can be squeezed into every second. Every single frame has the ability to contain elements and subtle intricacies that help strengthen the story both subliminally and obviously. The true art of film is how much effort and wit can go into each image painted on the screen for the audience to see, and how great the effect of seemingly little choices can be on the ultimate product.

Perhaps one of the best examples of a modern filmmaker who relishes in the art of visual storytelling is British director Edgar Wright. His greatest achievement is the creation of a collection of comedic movies nicknamed "The Cornetto Trilogy", as an homage to Krzysztof Kieślowski's "Three Colours Trilogy". The three films contained in said trilogy are *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *Hot Fuzz* (2007), and *The World's End* (2013), all written by Wright and lead actor Simon Pegg. The trilogy is not a chronological one; that is, the movies show no signs of being within any sort of a shared universe. What ties all three together aside from the recurring cast and crew is a common theme of growing up, friendship, and poking fun at classic genre tropes. In the words of Wright, "They're all about the individuals in a collective, they're all about growing up and they're all about the dangers of perpetual adolescence."

An astounding amount of clever film language works to accelerate these movies from standard films to unforgettable stories and experiences that never tire. In this analysis, we'll take a closer look at four particular elements that enhance the viewing experience: color palettes, lighting, framing and composition, and symbolism.

I. Color

The greatest factor that separates film from written works of art is the ability to visually portray stories and create a far more acute vision of the intended story for the audience to intake. In the early 20th century, the invention of Technicolor film saw the shift over from grayscale movies to the full color spectrum. This not only allowed for movies to appear more authentic to what humans see in real life, but it made for a greater array of colors to appeal to different emotions and feelings in the audience.

Unsurprisingly, the color grade in the three films in the trilogy all somewhat correspond to their given colors: *Shaun of the Dead* being red, *Hot Fuzz* being blue, and *The World's End* being green. These colors overall are intended to reference the genres each movie is based off of; horror, action, and science fiction respectively. However, of course, the color schemes in each movie are dynamic and cycle through a full spectrum of different themes or genres. To exemplify this, we will break apart the color palettes of certain scenes or locations from each movie.

To begin, let's look at *Shaun of the Dead*. The inciting incident may be the zombie apocalypse that ravages England, but the true story is about a man maturing and moving out of a

stagnant and cyclical lifestyle where he appears hopeless and powerless when it comes to getting himself together. It just takes a full-on apocalypse to show him that it's do or die, quite literally.

The color scheme at the beginning of the film is intentionally depressing and bland. Nothing in the frame ever stands out as particularly vibrant; much of the blank space is filled with whites, light gray hues, and faded colors, creating an overall drab, lifeless, and sadly conventional environment. Ordinary, safe colors work to imply an aura of stagnancy, boredom, and average everyday activities. Most shots are flat, and even if not, the static color grade refuses to give leeway for any depth to show itself. Essentially, the protagonist, Shaun, is stuck in a rut, and the sterile color grade helps us feel his struggle in an inescapable way. Shaun himself even appears almost entirely consumed by this depressing world— however, it is visible from one of his primary establishing shots that something is off. While the entire frame is cluttered with objects bearing a murky blue, gray, or brown hue, Shaun can be seen in a red shirt, standing out against the dull environment he's surrounded by. This one subtle choice in the color palette shows from the very beginning that Shaun does not belong where he is, which cleverly sets up his character arc for the remainder of the film.

Meanwhile, *Hot Fuzz* follows the story of a perfectionist urban police officer who has been humorously upgraded to the rank of sergeant, but relocated in a small, safe town in the rural countryside. The protagonist, Nicholas Angel, is extremely anal about following the law to a tee, to the point that it gets in the way of his ability to form meaningful connections with other people. As his new coworkers mock his hyper-awareness of everything going on around him and make fun of his suspicions of foul play, his morale decreases and he begins to accept that he's trying too hard. However, just after a failed hit job is put out on him, he discovers the horrible truth that the organization running the town is behind countless murders staged as accidents to protect their reputation.

This climactic turning point in the movie takes place in a church yard in the middle of the night, where the color grade is intentionally designed to invoke feelings of fear, horror, and cruel astonishment within the audience. Darker, blue-green colors wash out all traces of liveliness from the faces of characters, which instills a cold,
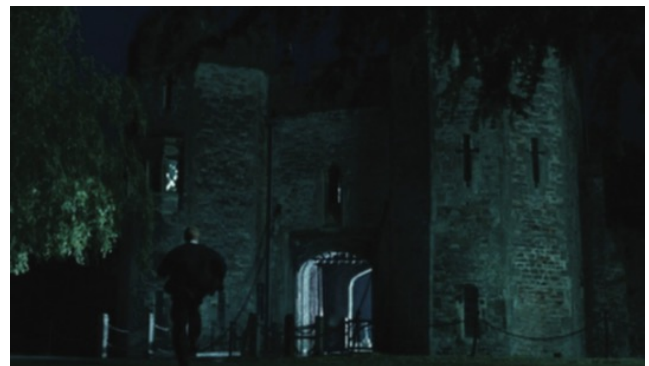
lonely, and dangerous atmosphere for the audience. It's creepy, dark, and foreboding, which sets a perfectly dramatic tone for a climactic revelation to occur. As an observer, you get this sense that the character is walking towards almost certain doom, given the dark and evil lighting, which at times looks almost as if it's deep underwater.

Nick is absolutely sickened upon learning the entirety of the organization behind protecting the town is involved in all the recent murders he'd been investigating, but what really

sucks all the hope out of him is when he learns that the police inspector himself is directly tied to them as well. While actor Simon Pegg's emotions brilliantly capture this feeling, Wright brilliantly exaggerates it for the audience through the use of a clever lighting cue, in which all the light

drains from his face. With this one gesture, the color palette takes the already somewhat cold but still lively colors in Nick's face and completely ices him over, showing the audience that all hope has drained from him, almost as if his blood flow has completely ceased circulation and left him a frozen body, already dead inside. Even more subtly, yet just as brilliantly, the flashlights being shined on his face causing the light in the first place don't just turn off, but are rather redirected at the inspector. It shows the power and liveliness of Nick fade away and the power of the inspector rise above him, showing the audience where Nick truly stands in this scenario.

Finally, *The World's End* tells a tragic story of an immature man who has lived the past twenty years of his life since his high school graduation still stuck in a teenager's mind, addicted to alcohol, and lacking any sort of true human connection. He manages to gather together his old group of friends, all now living their own independent lives, to reattempt a failed pub crawl they tried back in high school known as "The Golden Mile". In doing so, they discover that their old hometown has become a testing ground for an alien species trying to forcefully smooth out the rough edges of the human species by replacing them all with robotic replicas. While trying to save themselves from the mystery they've discovered, the truth about protagonist Gary King's

hollow lifestyle and scarring addiction are revealed, and we start to get a deeper understanding of the complexities behind this character that initially appears shallow, annoying, and brainless.

At multiple points throughout the movie, the frame is filled with faded colors and tainted with intentionally unpleasant shades of green and brown in order to create a sickly atmosphere

that appears downright disgusting to look at. The color palettes in both of these images are indoors, painting both rooms in discomforting colors that feel disturbing and unnatural. The colors used aren't too intense, nor too dull. They land in a perfect uncanny middle ground of disgusting that just makes you feel as if something is off. The characters in these two photos may be in different situations, but in both

instances, they are shown to be in undesirable locations, with a color palette that actively puts the emotions of the characters and feelings in the viewer. In the bottom photo, we get a firsthand look at Gary King's depressing and hollow lifestyle, while in the top one we understand the feelings of the characters upon learning

what has become of their hometown. Interestingly, the top photo shows the characters indoors after entering against the setting sun at dusk. After this terrible revelation, they exit the pub to a dark, hopeless, and horrifying world.

Overall, the innovation of color into filmography allowed for movie to have more themes, tones, and feelings established through subtle visual cues. The audience gets to see a

world that visually looks on par with what they see in real life. Changes in the color palette allow the audience to be taken out of this world they know completely, or have certain feelings invoked in them from recognizable palettes or color grades that make them feel a certain way. All three of these movies are directed by Wright to use all of these colorful aspects to his advantage as much as possible.

II. Lighting

Ever since the creation of film, artificial lighting has allowed for the director to utilize a controlled atmosphere. Lighting is something directly visible in our day-to-day lives that can affect our mood greatly. One may feel more depressed on a cloudy or rainy day, excited and happy on a sunny day, or tired and lonely in the cold absence of light that is nighttime. Through controlled environments, different styles of lighting can be used in films in order to set different tones and invoke different emotions in the viewer.

Low-key lighting, for example, is a method that intensely accentuates the shape of objects and their silhouettes against darker or less textured backgrounds. This style is used most often in dramatic films, such as the genres of film noir, horror, or thriller, to create tension. When utilized properly, low-key lighting places sole focus of a scene on the characters and their facial expressions. It sends a subliminal message to your mind to tell you a perilous or serious situation is at hand.

As all three films in Wright's trilogy dive into dramatic scenes, the lighting ratio skyrockets and the tone of the film intensifies quickly. Low-key lighting is used in separate

occasions in each film to depict hopelessness, revelations, and raised tensions in the characters and situations.

For starters, *Shaun of the Dead* depicts characters going through a zombie apocalypse. As they progress through the story, they are put in increasingly dangerous and frightful situations, ultimately making for a climax inside the local pub. During those scenes near the end of the movie, low-key lighting is used to create a feeling of impending doom and an apocalyptic style. The characters are lit against darker, dull-colored backgrounds, allowing for more focus to be given to their expressions. The low-key lighting is used in this instance to highlight the peril and emotion in their faces, and the humanity flowing through their veins. This is juxtaposed with the bleakly colored, blandly textured backgrounds they are up against. This extreme lighting technique implies hopelessness in the characters and gives off a figuratively claustrophobic vibe. You, as the audience, feel as though you aren't going to make it out and will never see the light of day again, and the lighting style used makes it appear as if this may be the end of the world.

In *Hot Fuzz*, following the previously mentioned scene, Nick barely has his skin saved by his police partner, Danny Butterman. He confronts Danny about the town's corrupt political scheme and attempts to rile him up, saying that they have to call the urban police force from the

city to intervene. Danny argues that he lacks the evidence and will be seen as crazy, and that it's no use trying to do anything.

Low-key lighting is used again in this scene, this time silhouetting the characters against

total blackness, and front-lighting their faces in a harsh fashion. Unsettlingly bright hues of red are used on the characters' faces to insinuate urgency and danger, while building tension through an
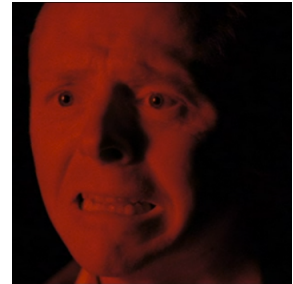
intense confrontation. The audience gets a sort of a ticking clock feeling, as if there isn't much time to dwindle, and that the characters have to make a decision and act fast. For one of the first

times in the film, Nick is begging for his partner to help him out, and you can feel his stress and hopelessness. The characters are clearly portrayed in a position of weakness or

subordinacy, in this case, to the town and their schemes. The lighting used is intentionally similar to that of classic crime dramas, using exaggerated monochromatic dark lighting.

In *The World's End*, Steven Prince is pulled aside by a skeptical conspiracist who explains the truth about the town and its alien residents to him. This scene works to drop a load of exposition at once, telling both the characters and the audience what there really is to be afraid of in this town; which ends up being much more than the protagonists or audience anticipated.

Low-key lighting is used in this situation alongside enhanced shadows, intense contrasts, and dark and overly vibrant hues to create an eerie vibe. The lighting is extremely abnormal,

lighting their faces with a blue shade that appears to strip all humanity and liveliness from them.

 It works similarly to the color palette described in *Hot Fuzz*, but this time the lighting is even further exaggerated, far darker, and much more extreme. What really makes this example of low-key lighting stand out, however, is the sickly contrast of colder, dark blue hues with the vivid

orange warm hues in the background. This bizarre mix of two extremes works to make a surreal and alien feel, giving off a severely uncomfortable vibe,a s well as conveying drama and revelation. It is intentionally visually unappealing, which is an admittedly risky move that is masterfully used in this movie to further tell the story of these characters. The stakes are very clear from this moment onward.

Overall, the medium of film allows for controlled lighting environments that can work to enhance the story and feelings of the characters. As humans, we all know what it feels like to be in the dark versus in bright light, and we know how much lighting conditions can affect our mood in real life. These elements can be used however desired by a filmmaker, and in cases like these above, even exaggerated to a point where overly dramatic lighting can be properly utilized to show the true severity of the situation at hand.

III. Framing and Composition

The single most powerful element a filmmaker has over their audience is the ability to choose what is and isn't shown within each shot. The audience does not have the choice to see what they see; the director gets the ultimate decision of telling the story from whatever perspective they want. Edgar Wright uses this skill to his advantage, crafting just about every shot masterfully in such a way that it helps strengthen character choices or repeated themes. Framing and composition are close cousins in filmography, though they are often confused; while the art of framing refers to the placement of the camera in the shot, composition surrounds what is included within each scene and its placement in the location. Together, they design the frame the audience sees in the final product. These following examples show just one method out of many within each movie that are used to develop character and story, utilizing intentional distractions to stress themes of a flawed relationship, loneliness, and a serious addiction.

The central driving plot of *Shaun of the Dead* revolves around Shaun and Liz's strained

relationship, which ultimately leads to Liz dumping him at the end of act one. The first few shots alone make the state of their relationship very clear through clever usage of the frame. While having a seemingly romantic night together out at a pub, the camera eventually pulls out to wider shots to show that each of them has brought their own flatmates along with them. Wright brilliantly uses the framing to place Shaun's crass friend, Ed, in the center of both

of Liz and Shaun, distracting the audience from the main subjects of the scene. He draws your

attention from what's going on in the foreground, which visually depicts the distraction of the

characters themselves. Following that

revelation, the frame switches to the other

side of the table to show Liz's friends,

David and Diane, who are also placed

between the two of them. They aren't as centrally placed, which shows that they aren't quite as

big a strain on the flawed relationship as Ed is, but are still a distraction to Liz. It's almost like a

defense mechanism put in place as a reaction to Shaun's inability to sort out his relationships.

In *Hot Fuzz*, the action packed story follows the development of Nick Angel, who over

the course of the film learns to get along with others better and form a stronger bond with various

characters. During a series of quick cuts near the beginning of the movie showing Nick's travels

from the city to the country, Wright specifically frames him in the center of the rooms he's in, far

away from any walls. This implies

a detachment from human

connection and general loneliness

in his life. Even around other

people, he takes up a considerable

amount of space in the frame,

looking awkwardly out of place. Attention is centered quite solely on him, uncomfortably putting

him on the spot. In the second image, he can be seen again in the middle of the frame, again

clutching his closest friend, a potted Japanese Peace lily, close to his chest. His position in the

middle of the blank, empty space implies a bitter and cold sensation of loneliness. This is the first time we get to see Nick outside of his work, and it shows us why he is so obsessed with his work: he is uncomfortable in his life outside of it. In his own words, he "can't switch off".


Finally, in *The World's End*, the story revolves around raging alcoholic Gary King, and is told mostly from his perspective. Though the film reveals the true consequences of his addiction as the plot progresses, it is very clear from the start that he has a serious problem. The framing is used here to personify the glasses of beer at the pubs, setting them in the foreground and highlighting their significant in the story. The top photo here is from the very first shot of the

movie— before the characters are even introduced, the beer glasses are seen glistening in the front of the image. The low angle works to put them at the same height of the characters, showing the object on a level playing field with them, having a large amount of power. They are personified to a point where you get the feeling that Gary values alcohol more than his friends. Later on, well into the pub crawl, Gary is kicked out of a pub before he can order a drink. He feels they have failed the "Golden Mile" pub crawl because he has failed to drink a beer at every bar. Outside of the pub, he sees abandoned glasses of beer sitting on a table. Even though they are out of focus, they are between the character and the camera, distracting us in a similar fashion to the shot of Ed in *Shaun of the Dead*, as mentioned

earlier. This shot helps the audience get a deeper understanding of how intense this addiction is, and in the very next shot, he can be seen in the background chugging every glass to fill his quota.
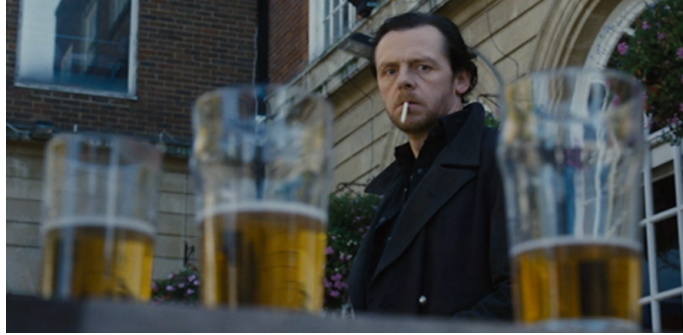
In summary, framing and composition is an extremely powerful tool experienced filmmakers like to use in order to tell their story and establish tones visually. Rather than using words or even actions necessarily, the mere angle from which the audience views the scene unfolding can give them a better idea of what the filmmaker wants them to feel or see. This kind of framing can be seen all over the first and final acts of well-crafted movies to show character traits, change, and growth.

IV. Symbolism

The final visual aspect that we'll be looking at today is symbolism within movies. Characters, objects, and the composition of scenes can take certain elements and use them to reference icons in pop culture, other stories, and tropes among other similar ideas. What this can do is stress the tone of a scene, environment, or character trait by just showing it to be similar to another through simply visual means.

For example, in *Shaun of the Dead*, certain people are often placed in the same location near each other, sharing common character traits that make them all appear painstakingly similar. During the opening title crawl, one of the shots dollies past the cashiers at a supermarket. To help

establish the bland, cold, and lifeless world that

Shaun has found himself living in, the cashiers all

stand in a row, sharing similar, robotic motions,

visibly tired and lacking any sort of energy. Their

motions as they scan each grocery are even synced up to a frightening degree. This lackluster

and conventional feel is humorously foreshadows the impending zombie epidemic, while also

showing the environment Shaun is forced to live in every day of his life. In fact, the one in the

front with the name tag "Mary" shows up later in the film as the first zombie Shaun and his

friend, Ed are forced to fight. In a scene just shortly after, Shaun can be seen riding on the bus for

a few brief moments on his daily commute to

work. Every character around him once again

has a vacant expression, creating the same

kind of symbolism towards zombies as the

example in the opening crawl. Like the zombies later in the film, many of them are staring into

space, wearing slack jawed expressions, and appearing exhausted. The audience starts to get a

sense that if one of them was actually a zombie, it would be hard to pick them apart from the

others. This idea comes to play later in the film, as the protagonists are so used to this world that

they can't even tell the zombies aren't just normal citizens.

 In *Hot Fuzz*, police sergeant Nick Angel theorizes that all the accidents occurring in the

town of Sandford, Gloucestershire are actually a series of murders connected by a group of

killers. While he ends up being right, the climactic twist reveals that his theory for the motivation

surrounding the value of a piece of property was completely wrong, and the actual reason is

humorously dark and petty; the citizens being killed simply don't adhere to the agenda of the town's governing organization. The organization is led secretly by the police inspector, whose wife committed suicide after fruitlessly slaving away to win the "best village award" and ultimately failing. He vows to avenge her death by taking extreme measures to do whatever it takes to ensure the village wins the award. Naturally, Nick is completely taken aback by this revelation, and like the audience, is shocked and disgusted. In the end, Nick regains his stature and leads the police force to a final battle against the Neighborhood Watch Alliance, the organization guilty of the homicides. After many separate fights in various locations against

different members, Nick ends up confronting the man who is set up from the start to be the villain, as well as Nick's prime suspect, Simon Skinner. The two of them end up fighting over a decorational

model of Sandford located at the edge of town. The humor here comes from the symbolism that may not be too obvious upon an initial viewing, but becomes clear upon repeated ones. The two of them engage in a fistfight on top of the buildings while sprinklers act as a sort of artificial rain, which in films usually represents change in emotions or power. The hands of the village are now Nick's, as the Neighborhood Watch Alliance falls from power. But the most humorous

symbolism is the mere fact that they are fighting on top of a *literal* model village. While the whole ruthless motivation of the antagonists had been to uphold a perfect representation of

their village, they are now carelessly destroying the *actual* model village below their feet. In the final act of the film, the conflict can be described as "a battle over a model village", referring to the fight between a perfect looking village that throws its flaws under the rug and an honest village that won't win the award. However, in this one scene here, the exact same description, "a battle over a model village" refers to a literal fight that is over, or on top of, a physically model village. It's a humorous exaggeration that shows how the villains of the movie are so wrapped up in their egos and a desire to be "the best" that they are willing to commit terrible atrocities, murder dozens in cold blood, and prevent any secrets from leaving their organization.

And lastly, in *The World's End*, the symbolism is far more subtle and brilliant, despite being mentioned various times throughout the film. Even with one of the central themes appearing to be the robotic aliens that have invaded the characters' home town of Newton Haven, symbolism to another tale, one more antiquated and surprising, is scattered all over from the beginning to the end. This tale is the classic ancient fable of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table and their epic quest for the Holy Grail. Some of the symbolism is hidden within the characters' surnames, which are King, Knightley, Prince, Page, and Chamberlain, all of which are positions of power or nobility within a governing body or organization. Some can be found in the script, such as Gary's anecdote about King Arthur ordering a mead at the bar after the Battle of Hastings, his calling himself "the once and future king", and his final line; "They call me The King." But much of the Arthurian symbolism is

cleverly hidden visually in the movie, such as this first example, a high shot during the opening crawl of the movie, which shows Gary King at the 12 o'clock position of an Alcoholics Anonymous circle. The circle greatly resembles the classic "Round Table" that King Arthur and his knights sat at, which was designed to specifically show a lack of any clear leader, as everyone held an equal amount of power as their cohorts. The ultimate irony in this shot is that the depressing setting of rehabilitation is being compared to what is seen as a fantastical and heroic group of knights. The film criticizes Alcoholics Anonymous at many points throughout its runtime, often clearly taking a jab at their well-known 12 step process that, in their words, are "a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole." The AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) website can be seen holding its organization up with an almost holier-than-thou sort of representation at times, almost as if they feel they *do* deserve to be compared to a group as grand as King Arthur's. They base their entire program around the idea of God, with the first three steps alone being to "[admit] powerless[ness] over alcohol", "believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity", and "turn our will and our lives over to the care of God". This high-angle shot shows a perfect balance of power among all the AA members at the meeting, while also establishing the idea that a greater power, a God, is looking down on the characters and is truly in control. Gary later in the film refers to the help he got from AA being "a lot of people sitting in a circle talking about how… awful things had got". Instead of the standard twelve step process, Gary embarked on his own twelve step mission to self-fulfillment- an epic pub crawl through twelve separate bars, to reach the final bar, "The World's End". This time, unlike the time he and his friends attempted it back in high school, he

manages to make it all the way to The World's End, despite the aliens trying to stop him from making it there. When he does eventually get there, we see this Arthurian symbolism again come back to the game as he holds the beer left waiting for him in the bar up to eye's level. King Arthur has conquered his quest to the Holy Grail, making it to the end of his journey. Again this shot here, in which he holds it up to eye level, uses the Arthurian symbolism to highlight just how pitiful this character is, and how the thing that's seen as an end-all be-all in his world is to complete a formerly attempted and failed pub crawl. It's pathetic to the point where Gary can be

seen at the second-to-last pub giving his car keys, his one shot to escape alive, to his friends, and dashing away on his own to make it to the end. This so-called conquest means so much to him that he is willing to completely throw away his meaningless life just to make it all the way through.

In summary, a deeper analysis of these films can show what they truly are. Unlike what many may perceive them as, they are not just videos of people acting out a story compiled into one long sequence. There are so many choices that go beyond the actors' decisions. The ability to use visual and audio cues to help develop the story and its characters is enough alone to solidify its cultural significance as an art form. Of course, there are many directors out there less

concerned with the creative vision than they are with making a film successful. But by diving into an analysis of the story and its aspects, you can easily determine whether or not the creative team behind the film was really passionate about the project or not, like Edgar Wright. Beyond the four aspects described in this write-up (color palette, lighting, framing and composition, and symbolism), there are plenty more visual flairs that can be analyzed in depth, including but not limited to costuming choices, transitions, parallel structures, and cross-cutting of juxtaposing tones. Every single one of them are carefully crafted in the pre-production phase to design a story that can be told delicately through each and every frame. Even if you never consciously noticed any of these intricacies, your brain picks up on it subconsciously and the audience is manipulated to feel certain ways at certain times. Like any work of art, there is much more to look at beneath the surface than what most people see; and anyone can do it if they try.

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